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Webster says map of Soviet Union could change by year's end

By ELIOT BRENNER

LANGLEY, Va. (UPI) — Outgoing CIA Director William Webster speculated some Soviet republics could secede by the end of the year and said Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's future is "increasingly uncertain."

A former federal judge and FBI director, Webster also told reporters Thursday Moscow is showing new concern about the security of its strategic nuclear weapons.

Webster, 67, who as CIA director supervises the entire U.S. intelligence apparatus, will leave after four years on the job. He is a holdover from the Reagan administration, having succeeded William Casey after Casey's death.

President Bush has nominated Robert Gates, his deputy national security adviser, to succeed Webster, who says he plans to practice law in Washington.

Webster noted independence movements from the Kremlin and speculated that five or six of the 15 Soviet Republics would secede. The Soviet Union could "be in a different shape" by the end of the year, said Webster.

"I think we will see efforts to pull the last remaining economic strings from the center to make the departure more costly," said Webster, "but I don't think that will do anything but slow down some headed for the exit."

As for the Soviet president, Webster said, "I think his future is increasingly uncertain." There may come a time when leaders such as Russian President Boris Yeltsin will keep Gorbachev to head a central government as "the best of centrist alternatives" while they pursue their own agendas.

Webster said the United States had always thought Moscow's control of its strategic weapons was "so complete and ironclad that there was very little risk" they might fall into "unfriendly hands" in the event of internal uprisings.

"We're seeing them pay more attention to this in ways that would suggest they are not as confident as in the past. I don't want to put that to you as something that's about to blow up. That's not the case," Webster said.

On the drug war, Webster said that some South American nations that once indicated they wanted extensive cooperation on anti-drug matters, notably Columbia, are starting to back away from the commitment.

"I'm concerned that some of the countries that we've counted on for really all-out support for this effort are rethinking and looking at

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more conciliatory ways of dealing with their own drug barons, drug lords. We see signs of erosion of will in Colombia," he said, citing questions about extradition and whether Colombia will protect its judges.

Additionally, Webster said the CIA is ``getting a much better handle of what is taking place in the world of drug trafficking and it's not a very encouraging report.'' For instance, Webster said that he believes there is more evidence of crop growing now than in the past.

On other topics, Webster said:

Iraq's oil pipeline provides the best economic leverage there is to oust Saddam Hussein and ``it will require a continued concerted policy of coalition members to encourage those things that will result in his removal.''

He does not believe that there is any truth to suggestions that Casey, while serving as Reagan's campaign manager in 1980, sought a deal with Iran to delay the release of American hostages until after the November election. In return the U.S. would provide Iran with weapons at a later date.

The intelligence community has ``more than a circumstantial case'' on the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, the jumbo jet blown out of the sky by a bomb in December 1988 over Lockerbie, Scotland. ``There were several of these (terrorist) activities taking place all about the same time ... There were lots of players, not necessarily coordinated, a number of nations implicated. I think we now have a pretty good view of where people came from for Pan Am 103 and how they did it.''

The budget for intelligence activities, rumored to be about \$30 billion a year and all hidden within the Pentagon's budget, will fall by several billion dollars over the coming years.